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Hundreds of Afghan refugees forcibly removed from Iran

In the past week, Iranian police have carried out mass arrests and forcible deportations of possibly thousands of Afghan men, women and children, denying them refugee protection.

Amnesty International is urging the Government of Iran to immediately stop the forced return of Afghans from Iran without giving them the chance to apply for voluntary repatriation or have their individual claims for continued protection assessed in a fair manner.

“The Iranian authorities have a duty to ensure that Afghans are treated with dignity and respect, not rounded up and herded out of the country to face possible persecution,” Amnesty International urged.

Entire families are reported to have been arrested by Iran’s Disciplinary Forces in southern Tehran and put in camps near the city before being bussed over the border to the Nimruz region of western Afghanistan. Afghans are picked up indiscriminately from the streets and buses are reportedly stopped and searched for Afghans.

The arrest and transfer of Afghans has taken place despite an agreement in February between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Iranian authorities. The agreement allowed Afghans without proper papers six months to register their presence. They could then either ask to be sent home or request further protection in Iran. This policy was to stop forced repatriation of Afghans from Iran, however large numbers of Afghans have been deported against their will.

An Iranian official reportedly said yesterday that the authorities would concentrate on voluntary repatriation, implying that a wave of forcible deportations may be over. However, even if these arrests are stopped in Tehran, Afghans living in other parts of the country are likely to be still at risk.

As a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and under the customary principle of non-refoulement, Iran has an obligation not to return anyone to a country where they could be subject to serious human rights violations.

Amnesty International also calls on the Iranian government to set up an impartial, independent and competent body to investigate report of forcible repatriation and bring those responsible to justice.

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